# *New York*
# Theatre Critics' Reviews
## *1952*

Volume XIII, Number 10 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of April 28, 1952

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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# "To Be Continued"

New York World-Telegram
and
The [illegible] Sun

April 24, 1952

## 'To Be Continued' A Stickney Natural

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Some of the most talented and agreeable people in our theater have gotten together to present "To Be Continued," a new comedy of charm, good humor and very little resolution.

It concerns an upheaval in the lives of three people who have been contentedly supporting a romantic triangle for 25 years. The mistress is vaguely troubled about her hold on the man she loves. When she hears his wife is restless for her independence, she decides to precipitate a divorce.

Prodded and abetted by a friend who has recently lost her similarly long-standing beau, the mistress sets things rolling with an anonymous letter.

**A Last-Act Appearance.**

Since this is a comedy, and the title is a tip-off, the whole play has to stand or fall on the wife's final decision. There is, of course, a good deal of dramatic effect in letting her appear only in the last act for a pay-off. The trouble with this, and consequently with the play's structure, is that the wife's big scene does little to clarify her personality, her motives or her real effect on the other two major characters.

Despite a lot of bright humor, the play has gone thin before this. There is no subplot to distract or contrast, and the nature of the play demands a great deal of conversation. All this might be acceptable if the finish really made its point.

William Marchant is going to be called a promising playwright, which sounds ignominious. He writes some very good dialogue, and understands most of his characters thoroughly. He needs to be more obvious about his points, and to rely less on the actors' charm for sustaining his story.

**A Stickney Role.**

In the major role of the mistress, Dorothy Stickney has character which must have been understandably irresistible to her. The woman is fluffy and a little vague, but entirely lovable and courageous. Miss Stickney makes her delectable.

Neil Hamilton as the husband makes a stuffy advocate of the status quo quite believably winning to the ladies. Luella Gear is responsible for an overwhelming amount of the evening's flavor with her wry handling of the deserted friend's eager nosiness.

Jean Dixon is properly likable as the wife, but she cannot entirely illuminate a part which never quite comes out and says what it means. Mary Gildea has some very engaging moments as a strictly principled retainer.

**"TO BE CONTINUED"**

Comedy by William Marchant; staged by Guthrie McClintic; setting by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Motley; presented by Mr. McClintic at the Booth Theatre, April 23, 1952. The cast:

Claude Franklin..Neil Hamilton
Annie.....Mary Gildea
Dolly.....Dorothy Stickney
Silvie Martineau...Luella Gear
Ted Pocock.....John Drew Devereaux
A Young Woman...Grace Kelly
An Older Woman....Jean Dixon

## New York Post

April 24, 1952

### By Richard Watts Jr.

## Another Play Has Been Produced

Guthrie McClintic is one of the illustrious producers and directors of the American theater, and what he was up to putting on William Marchant's "To Be Continued," which he offered at the Booth last night, I can't imagine. He gathered together some good actresses for it, got Donald Oenslager to provide an attractive set, and lavished affectionate care on the staging, and the result was considerably less than nothing. It is one of those mysteries of the drama that render it so confusing and exasperating an art form.

"To Be Continued" is apparently intended as a highly sophisticated and civilized comedy. At least, it is presented through the eyes of a splendid lady who is a rich man's mistress, and then it goes on to show the admirable domesticity of extra-marital love, with the wife seemingly an unsympathetic and heartless menace, until she makes her appearance in the last act and proves to be just as fine a woman as the mistress. The happy and, of course, sophisticated ending comes when the three of them decide to go right on with their arrangement.

**Being Civilized**

Just how civilized all this is, I'm not quite sure, but I am reasonably certain that, if this design for living is to be entertaining on the stage, it should be offered to the accompaniment of some wit, brightness and skill, and perhaps with a touch of insight into character. Since all of these qualities are distinctly lacking in "To Be Continued," it is my uncomfortable suspicion that there is little justification for the play's existence and that Mr. McClintic wasted everybody's time by bothering with it.

At one point in the evening's proceedings, Neil Hamilton, who plays the husband, takes off his shirt, and my guess would be that this is somehow one of the less exciting moments in the season's lugubrious history. You may remember Mr. Hamilton as one of the dashing heroes of the early days of the cinema, and I must say that he doesn't seem to have aged at all in the intervening years. But he hasn't grown notably as an actor, either, and, as the incredibly stuffy gentleman with a wife and a mistress, he struck me as considerably less than happy.

Dorothy Stickney, one of the distinguished actresses of our stage, has the role of the noble mistress, and I gather it is regarded as the cream of the jest that Miss Stickney, the celebrated Mother of "Life With Father," should be representing illicit love. It is hardly worth her trouble. The wife is played by the invariably delightful Jean Dixon and it is one of the play's worst sins that it keeps her off the stage until the third act. As usual, she is a great aid and comfort, but there isn't enough for her to do.

Luella Gear, another veteran actress with a distinctive comedy style, appears as another of the unmarried matrons, and the part doesn't seem to cause her any difficulties. Then, there is Grace Kelly, who is an exceptionally attractive young actress and obviously has far more talent for the theater than her one brief scene as the daughter of the legal marriage allows her to display. The best I can say of "To Be Continued" is that it is the latest distressing case of some good actresses and an eminent producer in search of a play.

**Daily Mirror**

April 24, 1952

## 'To Be Continued' Gets A Haphazard Start

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"To Be Continued" arrived at the Booth Theatre last evening. But not for long, we suspect. And that's a pity. For William Marchant is a most promising playwright. He has a fine flair for amusing dialogue, though he has considerable to learn yet about dramatic construction.

The Marchant comedy has to do with a prominent jeweler who, over a period of 26 years, has spent three days of each week in the country with his wife and four in town with his mistress. The latter, alarmed by the flight of an acquaintance's boy friend, decides to bring matters to a conclusion in her favor. As a starter, she sends an anonymous letter to the wife.

This results in a meeting of wife and mistress. The mistress is amazed to learn that the wife has kept tabs on her over the years, but has been smart enough to accept the compromise relationship. And thus it ends. There will be no divorce. They will continue to share the fabulous jeweler, and even be somewhat friendly about it. Or, as Marchant intimates, civilized.

To be successful, we think, such a theme must be handled as farce or as drama. It becomes too implausible as sophisticated comedy. There may be two women like Ethel Franklin and Dolly Bannerman, but we doubt it. The French might accept such a situation, but it seems both immoral and incredible over here.

Producer Guthrie McClintic hasn't helped matters with the casting. Neil Hamilton looks like a juvenile as the jeweler. While Dorothy Stickney and Jean Dixon, as the mistress and wife, are quite mature. Though Miss Stickney is delightful as the courtesan, she sometimes gives the role "Life With Mother" touches. Miss Dixon is suavely sarcastic as the aging, understanding wife.

Luella Gear has some hilarious moments as the abandoned acquaintance, who brews the tempest in a teapot. Miss Gear is a star, an adroit comedienne, but she gets in trouble when she has to listen to others on stage. It takes great histrionic skill to listen convincingly. Mary Gildea is nothing less than wonderful as an obtuse maid.

John Drew Devereaux and Grace Kelly do well in brief appearances. Miss Kelly is tall and easy on the eyes. She acts with sincerity, but could learn a thing or two about the art from her distinguished uncle George.

Come to think of it, "To Be Continued" has some of the earmarks of an inferior George Kelly product. The women seem bloodless types, projections of the author's mind, rather than real people.

The program fails to tell us anything about playwright Marchant. Anyway, at his best, he can spin off glossy, funny laughlines. And on occasion, he can probe interestingly into characters. He has given us so much of merit in "To Be Continued" that it is regrettable he hasn't given enough.

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**Journal American**

April 24, 1952

## It Is Inconsistent And Unbelievable

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE thesis of "To Be Continued," which was presented last night by Guthrie McClintic at the Booth Theatre, seems to be that an idyllic male existence can be achieved by maintaining a wife in Fairfield, Conn., and a mistress in E. 10th st., New York City—and if, after 25 years, either doll tires of the arrangement, she's crazy.

There are certain obvious impediments to this program which occur to those of us who are muddling along with only a wife to worry about.

Where do we find in addition a young lady of wealth, refinement and beauty who will provide us a lavish city abode from Monday through Thursday, and what kind of wife will remain placidly in Connecticut for over two decades, rarely coming to town, and never insisting on joining us on our clandestine trips abroad?

Also one who agrees, when the chips are finally down, that it is a practical and pleasant way of life?

I don't believe it.

My real quarrel with William Marchant, the author, does not concern these inconsistencies however, because I think he might still have begun with this rather implausible premise and made an amusing evening out of it if he hadn't suddenly gone half serious on us.

The whole thing was going along in a glib and entirely farcical manner and then, somewhere toward the middle of that dread second act, everybody started trying to justify the proceedings on a basis of logic.

That's where they lost me. I will accept a good wild first act as well as the next fellow, but I resent it when the author does a switch and says, "You think this is crazy but actually it's much more than that—there's a lot of basic truth behind it all."

In this instance the author brought in the daughter to plead with the mistress not to break up the home; he impelled the wife to seek out the mistress and then projected the husband into this vortex to provide the big dramatic finish. By this time the original humor had vanished and the denouement packed all the punch of a high school valedictory.

* * *

### Talent Wasted

IT IS DEEPLY REGRETTABLE that so much fine talent was thus wasted. Dorothy Stickney, as the mistress, was suitably sympathetic and yet her part required her to be at various times the most naive and also the most forthright and enlightened person possible; Neil Hamilton, as the fortunate hero, performed with conviction within the limits of his role, but his role never permitted me to believe him for a minute. It happens that for me Luella Gear can do no wrong.

Last evening she was the one consistant character in the drama, a cast-off concubine, and she never ceased to be amusing. Jean Dixon performed majestically in an impossible position, striving to bring dramatic impact into the festivities at a late hour.

Grace Kelly, as the daughter, is certainly one of the most handsome young ladies on view this season and Mary Gildea, as the maid, provided innumerable raucous and sustained laughs.

Marchant can create farcical situations and he can write funny and occasionally hilarious lines. I hope one day he will do both on a more continuing basis than he has in "To Be Continued."

DAILY NEWS

April 24, 1952

# 'To Be Continued' Wins a Prize as The Season's Most Hopeful Title

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As a disheartening sample of the alarming weakness of the contemporary American stage, I can recommend "To Be Continued," a comedy by William Marchant which was offered last evening at the Booth Theatre. It has everything in its favor in the way of cast, sponsorship and setting and practically nothing to its credit in the matter of substance. Its appearance in a fine playhouse can only be described as an act of desperation.

There have been worse plays this season—cheap plays, gross plays and stupid plays—but none so wasteful of good actors and a good production. It is a void in which such admirable actors as Dorothy Stickney, Jean Dixon, Luella Gear and Neil Hamilton find themselves caught, without motive, without movement and without character.

**The Author Liked It.**

I suppose Marchant thought he was writing something pretty saucy when he contrived a comedy about a man who lives on a double standard—with a mistress Mondays through Thursdays and with a wife Fridays through Sundays. It must have struck Marchant as hilarious that this kind of double life, so devilishly wicked, could have gone on for 25 years without mistress and wife ever having met. And it must have damn near killed him with joy when he thought of having the two females meet at long last and talk it over. Otherwise he could not have written such a dull sex comedy.

I don't know what possessed Guthrie McClintic, usually a man of discernment, to produce and direct "To Be Continued." He would have done much better by reviving Henry Arthur Jones' 1894 comedy, "The Case of the Rebellious Susan," with the same good cast. There was more sex in it, and more wit, and more sophistication—and it was a sight more modern in its examination of the problem of female vs. male.

Nothing happens in three acts of "To Be Continued," and alarmingly little is said. The living-room designed by Donald Oenslager and the ladies' clothing by Motley, Edith Lutyens, Falkenstein, Braagaard, Hattie Carnegie and Marian Wright are rather helpless attractions.

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NEW YORK Herald Tribune

April 24, 1952

# 'To Be Continued'

By WALTER F. KERR

WILLIAM MARCHANT'S "To Be Continued," which ambled into the Booth last night, is one of those comedies which means to take its pleasure by impudently inverting the normal order of things.

The curtain rises on an affectionate couple who are congratulating one another on the felicity with which they have spent twenty-six years together. The kicker, of course, is that they are not man and wife, but man and mistress.

Claude Franklin spends Monday through Thursday with his pert, petulant and birdlike Dolly. The week ends he gives to his rather sober and responsible wife. The arrangement has been a comfortable one, and Dolly even has a pleasantly wistful desire to meet Mrs. Franklin some time.

Before long one of Dolly's friends, similarly set up with a gentleman named Albert, is on the scene. It seems that they are all getting older, and Albert has inconsiderately disappeared. Dolly is pressured, after some argument, into pushing Mrs. Franklin for a divorce and trying to secure her man on a full-time basis before it is too late.

In the last act the two women thrash it out in the presence of the infuriated male—who is here described as the "field of battle." It turns out that they all really like one another very much, that the equitable division of time is the best possible thing for all concerned, and the arrangement, as the curtain falls, is to be continuod.

The trouble with "To Be Continued" is that it has not been written by George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, or S. N. Behrman. It is high comedy without ebullience, a topsy-turvy world which has no fun in it.

Mr. Marchant writes a literate line, and his characters are, as one of them points out, thoroughly articulate. But complex sentence structure is not quite the same thing as wit, and for most of the evening we must listen to carefully fashioned and extremely cultivated language which never explodes into mirth. There are titters here and there, it is true, but they are ghostly in the over-all hush.

The production is as mannered as the play, and about as lacking in verve. Guthrie McClintic has directed his people very casually, rarely asking them to raise their voices, rarely daring anything more vigorous than a slow stroll about Donald Oenslager's tastefully decorated living-room. If the effect is remarkably lackadaisical, it is hard to see how Mr. McClintic could have risked anything more emphatic without shattering the script to pieced.

He has assembled a thoroughly graceful company. Dorothy Stickney flutters about the stage in a trailing negligee with a light, bright innocence which might have served very nicely if she had been given some really winning things to say. Neil Hamilton, looking no older than when he played in the silent film version of "Beau Geste," is easy and amiable as the tidbit the two ladies decide to share. And it is a real pleasure to see Jean Dixon again, though she doesn't turn up until the last act and then has nothing to do but look stunning and speak firmly.

The real honors of the evening, though, are divided between Luella Gear, as the helpful busybody who nearly disrupts an ideal menage, and Mary Gildea as the housemaid who likes to be kept in touch with the illicit goings-on. Miss Gear is able to make a stock line like "They're at it again—those suburban women!" sound as though it were somehow a comedy gem, and she manages one of those telephone scenes with real aplomb. And the happy anticipation Miss Gildea is able to get into a remark like "Are we going to move the furniture around again?" is topped only by her trance-like parade, in a converted Lanvin gown, through a suddenly startled group of women.

Miss Dixon, Miss Gear, and Miss Gildea do extract some laughter from their pantomime moments. But these are oases in a tepid and talkative evening.

**The New York Times**

April 24, 1952

## AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although "To Be Continued" looks brilliant, it sounds dull. It looks brilliant because Guthrie McClintic has produced it with elegance and cast it with taste. To represent the studio living room of a house on East Tenth Street, Donald Oenslager has filled the stage at the Booth Theatre with a spacious and opulent set that is somehow restful and soothing. Dorothy Stickney walks through it all evening, scatter-brained and adorable and giving an impression of being just on the verge of some sensible decision. Throughout the third act, Jean Dixon prowls through it with the cool authority of an actress who can make one word sound like quite an effective speech.

* * *

An old hand at style in direction, Mr. McClintic has done this one perfectly. For the grace and punctilio of a gentleman—Neil Hamilton, whose manners are above reproach. For worldliness and cynicism—Luella Gear, who drops a little acid into every inflection. All those actors, and a couple more, move around the stage in a polite arabesque of affection, intrigue and compromise. They give a silken performance that looks brilliant because everyone is an expert and a professional and also because Motley has dressed the women fastidiously.

In the course of the evening they have to say something, and this is where the trouble begins. For William Marchant has written a comedy that begins amusingly but concludes with some fairly stuffy moralizing. His central character is a woman of middle age who has been for years the city mistress of a gentleman who spends his week-ends with his wife in Connecticut. Fearful that she may lose the man she loves, the mistress sets in motion some mysterious forces designed to provoke the wife into a divorce.

* * *

Although the first two acts are thin, they have a neat sense of humor and seem to promise one of those comedies about expensive infidelity that went out of fashion when the income taxes became so high. It seems like the good old days before the war to hear the sins of the rich discussed so urbanely.

But it seems like the days of Clyde Fitch before Mr. Marchant is finished. In the last act he brings the wife and the mistress together for one of those electric scenes when virtue and vice take each other's measure. But "To Be Continued" ceases being a comedy at about this time. It becomes a drama. People address each other in a state of virtuous indignation. Some very noble decisions are made.

* * *

But to one theatregoer "To Be Continued" throws away what little it has accomplished in the first two acts and becomes an obsolete problem play. When the curtain falls on a happy ending, nothing remains except the pleasant impression of Miss Stickney skipping around the stage like an anxious sprite and Miss Dixon pinning all the loose ends down with quiet force and saturnine humor. Excellent acting: inadequate drama.

# "Candida"

DAILY NEWS

April 23, 1952

## Olivia de Havilland Ends Hit Tour In 'Candida' With a Month in N. Y.

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Olivia de Havilland is practically dauntless. Tiring of her Oscar-riddled career in Hollywood and aiming for a life on the stage, last season she engaged in a bout with Juliet and lost to Shakespeare's gentle maiden, three falls out of three. So now up she bounces for an encounter with Shaw's formidable female, Candida, and she does a little better—but still loses. At the premiere at the National Theatre last evening I made it only two falls out of three. In some of the lesser scenes of the Shaw comedy Miss de Havilland was quite nice, but the big eeny-meeny-miney-Moe finale sort of threw her.

My report of this thespic tussle cannot make much difference to a screen star of great renown and attractiveness, for she has been touring in this production of "Candida" since last Fall and doing great and profitable business. She just dropped in here for a four-week stand to wind things up. I salute her as a gallant lady and can offer her a shred of comfort. She is a better Candida than Rep. Clare Boothe Luce was at Stamford, Conn. Her only superiors in my time as a playgoer have been Katharine Cornell and Peggy Wood.

### A Good Move.

The one who comes off best in this new "Candida" is not Shaw, as one might suppose, but Ron Randell, in the role of Candida's husband, the Rev. James Morell. Indeed, he's as good a Morell as I ever saw, playing with strength, humor and insight. There's a fair-ish Prossy in the person of Pamela Simpson and a reasonably earthy Burgess in the person of Bramwell Fletcher.

But Terrance Kilburn's Marchbanks made me uneasy last night. The role of Marchbanks is one of the dirtiest tricks any dramatist ever played on an eager actor, anyhow, being more than somewhat effeminate and generally quite silly, and it takes a Burgess Meredith to make it count for something. Mr. Kilburn fails to endow the ineffable Eugene with the strength necessary to make him a true candidate for Candida's hand.

There is a good set by Donald Oenslager. Herman Shumlin redirected "Candida" for its New York visit and he must have done what he could.

"CANDIDA"

Play by Bernard Shaw; staged by Herman Shumlin; scenery by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Motley; revived by Thomas Hammond at the National Theatre, April 22, 1952. The cast:

Miss Prosperine Garnett.... Pamela Simpson
Rev. James Morell.. Ron Randell
Rev. Alexander Mill..... Frank Leslie
Mr. Burgess.. Bramwell Fletcher
Candida..... Olivia de Havilland
Eugene Marchbanks..... Terrance Kilburn

## The New York Times

April 23, 1952

### *Olivia de Havilland Comes to Broadway in a Revival of Bernard Shaw's 'Candida'*

By BROOKS ATKINSON

After touring the country since last October, Olivia de Havilland has come to town in Shaw's "Candida," which opened for a limited engagement at the National last evening. Miss de Havilland is a beautiful, modest and sincere lady whose enthusiasm for the stage is much appreciated in this neighborhood.

In the circumstances it is distressing to report that her Candida is not a perceptive one. It has little of the warmth, reserve and insight that Miss Cornell has brought to the part on several occasions. For all her grace and sweetness, Miss de Havilland does not reach down into either the comedy or the wisdom of Shaw's most beloved heroine, and does not bring the character of a woman to life.

* * *

Plays that have been on tour for several months sometimes acquire unpleasant characteristics. The actors play as though they were afraid that the audience does not understand what they are doing. Although Herman Shumlin, a talented director has been restaging "Candida" for the New York showing, the performance is still over-eager, over-emphatic, full of visual distractions and obtuse.

No doubt, Donald Oenslager's shrewdly sanctimonious setting for Pastor Morell's study is good period designing, and Motley's costumes represent the Victorian modes of Candida's day. But can't something be thrown in for the enjoyment of theatre—a little color or a stunning design? You would think that "Candida" were being acted in a library.

* * *

In all conscience, the acting is not inspired. Ron Randell's Pastor Morell is intelligible and manly, but it leaves out the pompousness essential to the part and the play. Terrance Kilburn's Marchbanks has none of the inner fire of a poet. Pamela Simpson's Prossy is routine stock-playing, and Frank Leslie's curate is without distinction. Only Bramwell Fletcher brings the tang of theatre into the performance. As that unctuous scoundrel, Mr. Burgess, the shoddy contractor, Mr. Fletcher plays with humor and extravagance.

Otherwise, you would hardly suspect that "Candida" is one of the works of Bernard Shaw; or, to be precise, the one work he wrote at about the time of his marriage when, despite his better nature, he was feeling romantic. There is a Shavian paradox in the conclusion, and a good deal of Shavian satire of Victorian piety and spiritual fraud. But Candida is the one heroine he gave his heart to, inasmuch as he was not in full control of himself at the time.

* * *

She is a fascinating woman. She has a mind of her own; but, being a well-bred coquette, she buries it in charm. Miss de Havilland has the charm in abundance. But there is very little coquetry in her acting. Although she is pleasant, fluent and gracious, she speaks her lines without spontaneity, and never finds the heart and pity under Candida's social manner. Since there is nothing very deep in the character, she gives an impression of politely condescending to her two problem children, and that is probably the last thing she intends to do.

For she is a lovely lady with good motives who unfortunately lacks experience in acting on the stage.

---

## New York Post

April 23, 1952

### By Richard Watts Jr.

### Miss de Havilland Tries 'Candida'

Being a young woman of remarkable grit and determination, Olivia de Havilland is still heroically bent on proving herself as important an actress in the theater as she has been in the movies, and such dogged courage deserves to be rewarded. Regrettably, however, determination is not enough on the stage, and it is to be feared that Miss de Havilland did little to advance her ambition last night when she appeared at the National in a singularly lackluster production of Bernard Shaw's "Candida." There were, I thought, a number of things wrong with the presentation, but the most serious was that it bathed Shaw in dullness.

It must be granted that "Candida," although it is still one of the great man's most delightful comedies, has been done so frequently in our time that it requires something rather splendid in the way of acting to make it seem properly arresting any longer. That it received no such brilliance last night is, I am afraid, a matter of understatement. The playing in general was, to put it mildly, undistinguished, and, in addition to the weaknesses in the characterizations, there was a pall of colorlessness hanging over the proceedings that turned a moving and beautiful play into something very close to a bore.

**Clerical Windbag**

The closest to a satisfactory performance was Ron Randell's Morell. It is certainly not my contention that Mr. Randell's playing of the clerical "moralist and windbag" is ever likely to be numbered among the memorable portrayals of a celebrated role, but, at least, the Australian actor managed to achieve a force and vitality only too lacking among the other performers. Bramwell Fletcher likewise succeeded in bringing a touch of forcefulness to the part of the heroine's disreputable father. I have seen both characters far more richly portrayed in other productions, but never have they stood out more strongly among their associates.

Among the misfortunes of the current revival must be placed Terrance Kilburn's Marchbanks. It is not, I should hastily add, the worst performance of the famous role of the young poet I have ever seen. That is a dubious honor I would have to bestow on Marlon Brando. Mr. Kilburn at least had a touch of the proper intensity. But, whatever merit he earned by that quality, he more than sacrificed by the misapprehension he occasionally seemed to be under that he was playing Peter Pan. The Rev. Mr. Morell was a fairly fatuous fellow, but even he could never have taken this Marchbanks seriously as a romantic rival.

**Miss de Havilland**

Miss de Havilland's Candida was earnest, industrious and extremely well-meaning, but it was also curiously dull, colorless and lacking in the necessary humor, graciousness and beauty of the part. I thought, too, that she made Shaw's compassionate and understanding heroine arch and rather patronizing, in addition to endowing her with a kind of disconcerting sharpness. If Mr. Kilburn sometimes appeared to wander off into the misty fantasy of Sir James M. Barrie, there were a few moments when I suspected that Miss de Havilland forgot she was playing Morell's wife and was impersonating his frustrated secretary, Prossy.

The final scene of "Candida" is so good that it is difficult for actors to miss in it, and here Miss de Havilland, Mr. Randell and Mr. Kilburn were decidedly at their best. But it wasn't enough. One who had never seen the play done before would never suspect what a lovely comedy it really is. On the basis of her courageous eagerness not to be downed by the lack of success of her "Romeo and Juliet" and her sporting spirit in trying to conquer the heartbreaking difficulties of the stage, Olivia de Havilland richly deserved a success last night. It seems a great pity that it continues to elude her.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
April 23, 1952

## 'Candida'

By WALTER F. KERR

I IMAGINE it must be difficult to mount a production of "Candida" from which all wit, all charm, all serenity have vanished. This particular labor was triumphantly accomplished, however, on the stage of the National Tuesday night.

By some monstrous alchemy, producer Thomas Hammond has managed to assemble an entire company of such straight-faced sobriety, such grim determination and such cheerless ineptitude as to make Bernard Shaw's bright and mocking comedy seem only a little bit heavier than a performance of "Wozzeck."

Olivia de Havilland is the Candida in this instance, and if she brings no particular illumination to the role, she is by no means alone in the darkness. She is surrounded by performers to whom it has not yet occurred that Shaw was joking. One and all they play the characters at face value, without relish for the sly pomposities, the fond and foolish fatuities, with which Shaw has invested them. They strain earnestly to make sense where Shaw was making nonsense, and what was meant to be a civilized frolic becomes an overwrought and extremely trying tract.

Miss de Havilland, as the serene and knowing wife of a popular and somewhat priggish clergyman, is utterly without repose. She buzzes at the lines, and at the stage business, with relentless animation. She widens her eyes, tilts her head, frowns prettily, and smiles ecstatically, in quick and almost frightening succession.

She is extraordinarily busy finding elaborate inflections for each stately line, instead of finding a character for herself and letting the inflections take care of themselves. The lines are announced, not spoken; and the energetic delicacy with which she darts from a rigorous husband to a stick-like suitor—from pillar to post, you might say—is all method and no magic.

I am sorry to say that young Terrance Kilburn is a good bit worse as the young poet who worships Candida and seeks to free her from her prosaic husband. Mr. Kilburn, once a child movie actor, has grown a good bit since he last said good-bye to Mr. Chips. But he has not acquired any evident skill or sensitivity in the process, and Marchbanks, always a difficult role, becomes an intolerable one. Mr. Kilburn buries his face in his hands frantically, begins every line at the same screeching crescendo, and in general behaves as though he belonged in "Flight Into Egypt."

Pamela Simpson, as Prossy, the lovelorn secretary to Candida's clergyman, turns in a standard stock company job, and Bramwell Fletcher, as Candida's genial blackguard of a father, decks out the part with a variety of random detail which has no central definition.

Only Ron Randell, as the Reverend James Morell, rescues anything in the way of sympathy or authority from the play. He is never quite certain just how pompous his man is to be, and he is caught up in the general insecurities of the evening, but it is possible to listen to him, and last night that was an enormous accomplishment.

We have finally been served with a completely humorless performance of what once seemed an indestructibly engaging play.

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## Stuff's There, But— Spark is Missing!

By JOHN McCLAIN

THROUGH all these years Bernard Shaw's "Candida" has stood up as a forthright and timeless treatise on human behavior but last night, in its current reincarnation at the National Theatre, it suffered a severe set-back. The stuff is still there—the lines, the humor, the philosophy—but in this version, which features the talents of Olivia de Havilland, the spark is missing. The whole thing starts well, gains speed and then sputters, backfires and finally dies.

The ignition trouble cannot be laid entirely to Miss de Havilland, either. I would say that Terrance Kilburn, miscast in the role of Eugene Marchbanks, accounted for his own share of missing cylinders. Even provided with Shaw's immaculate prose, I was never convinced that he could create the crisis upon which the drama is founded.

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### The Crux

This crucial situation, if you don't remember, involves a parson whose wife has brought a young poet home for lunch. The parson (Ron Randell), complacent and successful with his socialistic dogmatism, is not at first prepared to take a serious view of the poet's pitch at his wife (Miss de Havilland).

But by afternoon, when the poet has nearly succeeded in selling his philosophy to the frigid vestry secretary, he begins to accept him as an important threat to his domestic tranquillity. This is brought to a dramatic finale when he comes home later, having delivered a highly persuasive public address, to find his wife almost in the arms of the young aesthete.

As written by Mr. Shaw, this last scene is pungent and plausible. Miss de Havilland is obliged to choose then and there between her husband and Mr. Kilburn, the poet, and each is bidden by her to plead his case. Her final decision to remain with her husband because of his professed strength (actually weakness) as against the obvious self-sufficiency of the poet provides the pay-off of the play.

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### No Contention

But not, as I say, as presently presented. Ron Randell, as the preacher, is a most prepossessing and competent young man and a very good actor. Mr. Kilburn, his rival, undoubtedly knows his craft but didn't make me feel for a minute that he would have been a serious contender. Isn't there a present-day Leslie Howard?

Miss de Havilland has toured this play through 10,000 miles of the U. S. with success, which would seem to be reason enough for her to lose all self-consciousness. I know it isn't easy, but I wish she could read a line by Shaw as if it weren't written by Shaw. It would have helped the proceedings in the last act.

For the others I have only praise: Bramwell Fletcher, Frank Leslie and Pamela Simpson. And I approved Donald Oenslager's set, replete with an early 1900 typewriter almost like mine.